

Joint Sustainability Committee
RECOMMENDATION 20231213-007

Date: December 13, 2023

Subject: Austin Energy Resource Planning

Motioned By: Haris Qureshi **Seconded By:** Anna Scott

WHEREAS, it is the Joint Sustainability Committee’s responsibility to advise “on matters related to conservation and sustainability and review City policies and procedures relevant to the Austin Community Climate Plan and the Austin Climate Equity Plan, including planning, implementation, community engagement, goal setting, and progress monitoring”, and

WHEREAS, the greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal established by the Austin City Council in the Climate Equity Plan is to achieve “net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, utilizing a steep decline path followed by negative emissions” that translates to approximately 75% reduction in emission by 2030; and

WHEREAS, meeting the greenhouse gas reduction goals adopted by the Austin City Council in the Climate Equity Plan isn’t possible without significant emissions reductions by Austin Energy in the near, medium and long-term; and

WHEREAS, if the Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan emissions reductions are only or primarily focused on 2035, Austin will not meet the established greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal; and

WHEREAS, any near or medium-term increase in greenhouse gas emissions does not align with the Climate Equity Plan or the greenhouse gas reduction goals adopted by the Austin City Council; and

WHEREAS, reducing and eliminating local air pollution, especially in and near historically and currently marginalized and lower-income parts of the community, is an important equity and community health priority reflected in the Climate Equity Plan; and

WHEREAS, water conservation and reducing water use are goals established by the Austin City Council; and

WHEREAS, methane - the primary component of natural gas - has 86 times the global warming potential as carbon dioxide when emitted directly into the atmosphere, which is a well-documented problem and natural gas also releases carbon dioxide emissions when combusted; and

WHEREAS, green hydrogen currently only accounts for 0.2 percent of all hydrogen production and no hydrogen pipeline or other distribution infrastructure currently serves central Texas and no green hydrogen production exists in Texas; and

WHEREAS, strict standards on the production of green hydrogen are necessary to ensure that it reduces, instead of increases, greenhouse gas emissions and those standards are not yet in place; and

WHEREAS, hydrogen has 37 times the global warming potential as carbon dioxide and leakage rates from hydrogen infrastructure vary widely, making any climate benefit from using hydrogen uncertain and worsening climate change a possibility;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE JOINT SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE that the update to the Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan should:

1. Identify and commit to implementing energy resources that will enable near, medium, and long-term greenhouse gas emissions reductions that align with the Climate Equity Plan goals - significant emissions in the near term and eliminating or nearly eliminating emissions by 2030; and
2. Explain how any proposed plan will meet Austin's emissions goals, including by sharing annual projected emissions, as in the current plan.
3. Identify and commit to implementing energy resources that emit no air pollution to replace existing sources that create air pollution; and
4. Identify and commit to using energy resources that use little or no water.

The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends against building or investing in any way in natural gas or "hydrogen capable" generation.

Vote: 11-0

For: Chris Maxwell-Gaines, Kaiba White, Heather Houser, Melissa Rothrock, Jon Salinas, Rodrigo Leal, Haris Qureshi, Anna Scott, Charlotte Davis, Diana Wheeler, Amy Noel

Against: N/A

Abstain: Chris Campbell

Off Dais: Yure Suarez

Absent: Larry Franklin, Bertha Delgado, Alice Woods, Stephanie Bazan

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rohan Lilauwala', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rohan Lilauwala, Staff Liaison